

## **DELAMAR MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 126,257 acres**

Delamar Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA), NV-050-177, consists of the southern extension of the Delamar Mountain Range, is approximately 205 square miles, and is located in southern Lincoln County, seventy-five miles north of Las Vegas and approximately fifteen miles southeast of Alamo.

Roughly rectangular in shape, the WSA is 3 to 13 miles east to west, and 23 miles north to south. The western border is located along a powerline and unpaved roads, from its northwest corner, south to its juncture with Highway 93. It follows Highway 93 and old Highway 93 to another unpaved road on the south which eventually terminates, and the boundary goes on to meet Kane Springs County road. It follows the Kane Springs road for several miles, breaking off to follow an older road about one and one-third miles north of the Willow Springs road, continues on the road as it turns into the Delamar Mountains in a major drainage. The road and boundary continue northward through Gregerson Basin and around the north end of the unit to the northwestern corner. One long cherrystem penetrates from the northeast towards the unit's center and two shorter ones enter on the southwest.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -      0 acres recommended for wilderness 126,257 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for this WSA is not to designate the study area as wilderness and to release the entire area for uses other than wilderness. BLM's decision not to recommend the Delamar Mountains WSA for wilderness designation is based upon a determination of potential resource conflicts and manageability concerns including an inability to recommend a boundary that would be easily identified, manageable, and clearly recognizable to the user public. A lack of physical barriers to limit the incursion of off-highway vehicles into the WSA weighed heavily in the recommendation for this WSA. Although the entire area could be managed as wilderness, the resources that would be required to ensure the integrity of the boundary and the management of an area of marginal wilderness values would be cost prohibitive and could not be effectively enforced.

Topographic configuration of the WSA is such that most areas of the WSA are easily accessed from the cherrystemmed road and range improvements located deep in the center of the study area or up Bomber Wash from the south. Nevada Department of Wildlife has proposed placing up to eight upland gamebird water developments in the bottom of Bomber Wash. Development of these projects would encourage vehicle access deep into any area that would be recommended as wilderness. Slopes in the central portion of the WSA are such that they pose little impediment to off-road travel.

The highest quality wilderness values are in the Bomber Canyon area and along the periphery of the study area where solitude can be found. However, the majority of the study area exhibits a lack of quality wilderness values throughout a large portion of the WSA, the key consideration in the BLM's recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to be of a quality and continuity throughout the WSA to merit the area's inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). The WSA generally appears natural but the aggregate affects of gradual incursion of human activity and resource development around the perimeter and core of the study area and the potential impacts in Bomber Wash and sights and sounds adjacent to highway 93, combine to reduce the area where a quality recreation experience can be gained to a small "H" or "U" shaped configuration near the top of the mountains. Opportunities for solitude are extremely limited on the west side of the WSA due to the severe slope of the range and visibility to U.S. Highway 93.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The Delamar Mountains WSA is sixty-five to seventy percent natural with negligible human imprints except in certain areas. The area ranges from relatively featureless to very rugged and enclosed. With the exception of hunter access and water hauling for cattle, the area is currently seldom used by man. With the exception of the terrain exposed to Highway 93, the overall influence of human imprints on the area's naturalness is negligible.

The WSA contains two reservoirs, ten quail guzzlers, a five-mile bladed cherrystem road to one of the reservoirs, a three-mile cherrystem to Willow Springs, a one and a half mile cherrystem on the east and several ways. Affecting naturalness are the cherrystem to Pony Well, Highway 93 and the powerline corridor. Low level military jet aircraft overflights often occur.

**B. Solitude:** Several deep twisting canyons that issue from the central core region and into the southern bajada offer outstanding topographic screening provided by the cliffs and deeply eroded side drainages. Bomber Wash offers outstanding topographic screening. Topographic screening is outstanding in portions of the eastern mountainous region due to the numerous hills, peaks, washes, and draws.

Topographic screening in the plateau core area is severely limited. There is limited topographic screening provided by the cliff and bajada along the west side although this area does offer some topographic relief if actively sought by visitors. The southern and eastern bajada areas offer limited topographic screening, provided by the shallow washes and low hills found adjacent to the uplands of the WSA.

The desert shrubs, mixed with a small open stand of pinyon/juniper, provide minimal vegetative screening through much of the WSA. The large size of the WSA increases opportunities for solitude.

The majority of the WSA is isolated from outside influences with the exception of the Pony Reservoir cherrystem road and the random aircraft overflights which destroy one's sense of aloneness.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The WSA lends itself to all types of primitive recreational opportunities, however, some precautions must be undertaken to ensure water is available in order to allow for any extended time periods. The size of the unit and the topographic diversity make these recreational opportunities range from low to outstanding. Most portions of the study area could be used for dayhiking, although long bajada areas would not be particularly attractive. Some of the long twisting canyons opening to the south, including most notably, Bomber Wash are likely routes. Many of the canyon areas and some of the boundary zones have rather spectacular cliffs which provide an attraction. In the canyons, these cliffs provide a sense of enclosure and isolation as well. On the north, a large northeasterly trending canyon makes an attractive hiking route. The higher peaks in the central and eastern portions are good destinations and provide expansive views of the Sheep Range, Pahrangat Valley, Meadow Valley Range, Mormon Mountains, Kane Springs Valley and beyond.

Large portions of the area lend themselves to various types of scrambling and climbing due to the steepness and rocky terrain. Opportunities for good photography of high, rugged, plateau type rock formations, rugged cliffs and Joshua trees are available throughout much of the WSA. The opportunity to observe and photograph desert bighorn sheep is possible. Hunting opportunities are limited for anything but scattered upland bird shooting. Due to the lack of water, horseback riding would likely be limited to the east portion out of Gregerson Basin.

**4. MANAGEABILITY** Two key management concerns affecting the Delamar WSA are vehicle access control and the paralleling utility corridor external to the WSA's western boundary. Terrain in the north portion of the study area makes it accessible to vehicular travel where casual and random use currently occurs. Access off

the Pony Reservoir Road and Gregerson Basin Road provides ample opportunity to leave the known routes. Closing the existing ways and controlling this random travel would be nearly impossible. Access along the west side of the WSA does not appear to be much of a problem. Casual and random use has occurred up several washes, but the terrain does not lend itself to ready access. All washes and most of the terrain in the south and east are accessible to vehicular travel. Little evidence of use exists on the ground. Access along the east side is restricted to the boundary road and the short way leading to the stock reservoir.

The BLM has been ordered by settlement of litigation to provide a permanent water in the pasture encompassing the Pony Well cherrystem road. A well was unsuccessful and some other means such as a pipeline or catchment may be necessary to accomplish the requirement. This may or may not cause some manageability problems, depending upon whether installations could be confined to the cherrystem road.

## **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

No known locatable, strategic or critical mineral resources are known to occur in or near this WSA. Due to discoveries of mineralized areas in similar rock types in the northern part of the Delamar Range and elsewhere, the possibility of undiscovered resources exists. The salable mineral potential in this WSA is insignificant because material sites and free use areas are plentiful along roads and highways near the WSA. There are no known leasable mineral values present within this WSA, although the entire unit is under oil and gas leases.

No major conflicts are foreseen and no strategic minerals are known to occur in the WSA.

## **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS**

During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 158 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Of those, 150 were written and 8 were oral statements received at the public hearing on the draft EIS. In general, 150 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Eight commentors supported the BLM preferred alternative, not to recommend the Delamar WSA for wilderness designation.

The Governors consensus review, December 28, 1984, concurred with the BLM's recommendation not to designate the Delamar WSA because of the "many resource conflicts."

The Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration observed that planned transmission lines in the corridor adjacent to the west side of the Delamar Mountains WSA would be greatly restricted if full wilderness status was designated, therefore, they support the Preferred Alternative. Los Angeles Department of Water and Power also identified conflicts with the WSA and potential rights-of-way adjacent to the study area.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency observed that "Criteria for selecting suitable versus unsuitable wilderness areas within the Delamar Mountains ... were not clear in the DEIS. This is particularly true when the Preferred Alternative (p. 2-2 to 2-4) and the Wilderness Accent Alternative (p.2-6 to 2-8) are compared." The Environmental Protection Agency recommended reevaluation of the Delamar WSA "since mineral resources are speculative, except for sand, gravel and perlite, (sic) and ORV use has a potential to be managed to some degree".